

Picture Perfect: Dealing with Body Image, Media, and the Eating Disorder Crisis

Laura N. Farrar, Author/Speaker, *Dancing In The Rain Foundation*

the quest for perfection...

- it's everywhere: media, school, peers, parents, even youth groups
- 1 in 3 high school girls are actively dieting**
- in 1950 the standard for beauty was 5ft 4in, 140lb. Today it's 5ft 10in, 110lb
- 2-4% of high schoolers admit to using steroids.
- plastic and cosmetic surgery is on the rise

starving for love...

- research teen life: discussion boards and online journals, to see how they are feeling and thinking.
- "I hate my life"
- "I'm so disappointed in myself"
- "I have to wear makeup to be beautiful"
- the cry of our culture is "love me" and they'll do anything to get it

"I had sculpted myself into my own thin perfect creation. Starvation, perfection, and destruction were the mandates I had given myself. Wasting away meant that I was pretty, worthy, and somehow *holy*. I couldn't stop.

-Sheryl Cruse, *Thin Enough* p. 13

gender differences...

- being female in society means: restriction
 - The Princess Myth
 - Beauty Pains
- being male in society means: privilege, but also pressure

media...

- ads are everywhere: what messages are they sending?
- recognize offensive advertising & do something about it
- glamorizing disorders, dieting, and "made-up" perfection

body image...

- unrealistic expectations give goals that can never be reached!
- distorted perception, disapproval, obsession, addiction, fear & guilt
- worthy/unworthy of love (based on appearance) [Jeremiah 31:3]
- results: true vs. false selves

"My best friend is so skinny. I hate her...No...I hate myself. I hate feeling like this—like I am fat and ugly and like I am a total Loser with a capital L. It makes me sick."

-Melody Carlson, *Faded Denim*, p. 7

eating disorders...

- Anorexia Nervosa – self-starvation, excessive exercise, devoted to losing weight
- Bulimia Nervosa – cycle of binge eating followed by purging
- EDNOS – eating disorder not otherwise specified
- Binge eating disorder (compulsive eating disorder) – binge eating without purging
- Reverse Anorexia – men perceive themselves as small and frail even though quite muscular

what they need...

- above all—love and support (Isaiah 43:4)

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how to help...

- talk about body image, health, relationships and mood: how do you view yourself? Feel about yourself? How does food make you feel? Emotions when you eat? After you eat? Motives for dieting?
- listen and provide support and suggest professional help in serious situations
- eventual goals to pursue: get help from a nutritionist, set an exercise limit, stop using the scale, focus on identity in Christ, journal and use healthy coping mechanisms, identify ungodly beliefs and replace with God's truth (Psalm 139:14)

biblical thoughts...

- you are beautiful in God's eyes (Psalm 139:14, Song of Solomon 4:7, Proverbs 31:30)
- you can find freedom and recover through God's strength (2 Corinthians 3:17, Jeremiah 29:14, Psalm 90:14, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, Matthew 28:20, Psalm 30:11)
- your body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

"It's like everything's squeezing me with an iron fist, a death grip--pushing me, prodding me, making me who they want me to be. I've worn so many masks lately, becoming so many different people on demand, that I don't know who I am anymore."
-fifteen year old Bulimia survivor

beyond skin deep...

- Life Hurts, God Heals (www.lifehurtsgodheals.com)
- retreats./speakers (girls: leave the makeup behind)
- talk about self-image and its sources
- focus on inner beauty (compliments, personality, talents) rather than outward appearance
- address media influences and advertising

For more resources and discussion visit

www.laurafarrar.com

www.dancingintherainfoundation.org

WEBSITES...

www.mercyministries.org (residential ministry)
www.nationaleatingdisorders.org (more info)
www.lifehurtsgodheals.com (celebrate recovery)
www.jeankilbourne.com (media action)
www.cpyu.org (articles and research for Christian parents/youth leaders)

Eating Disorders

-*Thin Enough: my spiritual journey through the living death of an eating disorder* by Sheryl Cruse

-*Next to Nothing: a firsthand account of one teenager's experience with an eating disorder* by Carrie Arnold

-*Starved* by Nancy Alcorn

Music...

-“All the Beauty (Kati's Story)” written and recorded by JJ Heller

-“Courage” written and recorded by Superchick

Fiction...

Faded Denim by Melody Carlson

COUNSELING

-*Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide, 3rd Ed.* by Gary Collins, Ph.D

-*Reviving Ophelia: saving the selves of adolescent girls* by Mary Pipher, Ph.D